THE LONGEVITY OF THE ANCIENT GREEKS (HAWKINS, 1829; ANGEL, 1947-60)

IN 1958 Richard S. Stewart* wrote: "It is a curious and suggestive fact that the early history of classical Rome is better understood by modern scholars than by any historian of the time of Caesar Augustus." This surprising fact is the result of 19th and 20th century scholarship, exemplified by the researches of Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903), which were extended by countless successors. To the work of historians and classicists much has been added in recent decades by archaeologists and anthropologists. What is true of the Romans and their deeds is also true of the Greeks, so that we need not scruple to acknowledge that Herodotus, Polybius, and Thucydides have been outdone, though not displaced.

Lest these contentions appear brash or arrogant, we subjoin a series of excerpts by which the reader can see for himself what scholarship has accomplished during the last 150 years. These excerpts are limited to a single aspect of Greek history, viz. longevity.

> "No documents remain to inform us of the rate of mortality, or of longevity, amongst the Greeks."
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> Hawkins, F. B. *Elements of Medical Statistics.* London, Longman, 1829, p. 5.

> ". . . there has been no inquiry into the possible increase in longevity, with attendant social problems, which the rise of civilization in ancient Greece may have produced. Such a study must be based largely on skeletal material, since no written data have been handed down from prehistoric Greece. . . .
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> From the third millennium B.C. to classical times (650-150 B.C.), longevity in ancient Greece increased slightly but significantly, as shown by study of skeletal remains. The data are too scanty to determine the exact change in life expectancy, since skeletal remains of really old people and of children are extremely inadequate in number. However, the change in age composition of the popula-

* Stewart, R. S.: Theodor Mommsen's *History of Rome, Harvard Library Bull. 12*:161-195, 1958.

TABLE—AVERAGE AGE AT DEATH OF MALE ADULTS*

Period	*Date*	*Age*	*No. of specimens*
Neolithic-Early Bronze	4000-2000 B.C.	33.2	40
Middle Bronze	2000-1500	36.7	105
Late Bronze	1500-1150	39.3	164
Classic	650-300	44.5	82
Roman	120-600 A.D.	39.4	62
Turkish	1400-1800	33.9	29
Modern Greece	1928 census	56.1	30,873

* Aged 15 or older.

tion was not great enough (nor life expectancy of the historic period near enough to that of today) for social problems of old age to arise in modern form. The aged continued to participate in the life of the community, through the respect attached to their judgment and opinions."

Angel, J. L. Length of Life in Ancient Greece, *J. Gerontol.* *2*:18-24, 1947.

". . . I have been able to repair and study over 600 skeletons and 1200 skulls dating from Neolithic times (pre 3000 B.C.) down to the 19th Century A.D. . . .

". . . It is natural to find a steady association between level of culture and average age at death of adults. This shows a change of about 10 years with rise and fall of culture. Perhaps more critical than this change in the average adult life span, with its increase of time for creative leisure, are the high infant and child death rates. At Middle Helladic Lerna we observe that at least 55% of 239 Bronze Age deaths are those of infants and children and 15% over 45; by classical times 49% of skeletons are those of children and infants and almost 25% are over 45, compared with the U.S.A. in 1900 where 35% of deaths were of infants and children and 42% over 45."

Angel, J. L. Physical and Psychological Factors in Culture Growth. In: Wallace, A.F.C., ed. *Selected Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences.* Philadelphia, Univ. of Penna. Press, 1960, pp. 665-670.

From a supplemental tabulation very kindly submitted by Dr. Angel, author of the two preceding passages, the accompanying table has been excerpted. Its data are based on work done by him in 1957-60. The increase of the age at death is clearly apparent.

It is understood that Dr. Angel will soon publish additional statistics that present the results of his most recent observations. These promise to be extremely instructive.

S. J.